

Last Mark Strategy

PLAYER SHEET - no solutions | US Letter | v1.0.0

2-6 players, with an adult host | Suggested ages 9-12 | Plan 20-30 minutes

Turn a historical take-away game into a paper strategy session. Cross out marks instead of handling matches. Players investigate which move leaves the other side without a winning reply. Losing a practice round supplies evidence for the next one; nobody is eliminated from the session.

Set up and play

One player sheet per team, pencils and an eraser. Print in black and white at 100% / actual size. No cutting, folding, props or account required. Keep the host guide separate.

1. Draw separate rows of marks for the stated piles. Two players or two teams alternate turns.
2. On a turn, cross out one or more remaining marks from exactly one pile. You may empty that pile, but may not touch another pile on the same turn.
3. The player who crosses out the very last mark loses. A pile size of zero means that pile is empty. For a puzzle, name a winning first move and explain how to reply afterward.

Warm-up: two single marks

Piles are (1, 1). You move first. What should you cross out?

Round 1: a useful losing position

Piles are (1, 2). You move first. Which move guarantees a win against best replies?

Round 2: two piles of different sizes

Piles are (2, 3). You move first. Find the winning move.

Final: three piles

Piles are (1, 2, 4). You move first. Find the winning move. Then test every kind of reply with the host.

Finish together

Finish by playing the final position twice with the teams swapping who moves first. Explain the winning reply rule; winning against a mistaken move alone is not a proof.

Mechanism reference: Project Gutenberg 16599, Last Match. New session instructions and examples.

Age and time are planning estimates. No child playtest or physical print trial is claimed.